



Notes from the Director

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IRAN

Over the past few weeks, much has appeared in the press on the so-called "intelligence failure" in Iran. Blame has been directed at, among others, the CIA, the State Department, the NSC, the President and our foreign policy in general. There is much conjecture and theory but, unfortunately, little appreciation for what intelligence can and cannot do.

Intelligence can tell you what happened yesterday and today. It can sometimes alert you to what might happen tomorrow. But, given life's inconsistencies, the degree individuals and nations are influenced by factors outside their control, and the vagaries of chance, it cannot forecast the future with 100% accuracy.

Beyond that, political prediction is the most elusive and difficult aspect of intelligence. Crops, armies, economic activity, etc., can be watched and counted. With socio-political upheavals, coups, or even elections we can only make educated guesses at best. The success or failure of such events is often a surprise to the

participants themselves. Our own Presidential elections, where there are no secrets and yet where predictions of the winner are often wrong, are a good example.

In the case of Iran, we would like to have done better. In fact, during last summer and fall we were reporting religious, economic, social and political centers of discontent. Individually they seemed within the capabilities of the government to contain. What we did not foresee is that a monarchy which had effectively controlled unrest for over 50 years would not act in time to do so again; and that a 78 year old cleric, exiled for 14 years, would become the catalyst which would cause those disparate opposition groups to suddenly coalesce. No intelligence service predicted that; no newspaper columnist; no academic; nor the Shah; nor, I suspect, did Khomeini.

We shall work to improve our political intelligence. Primarily, it will require CIA, Defense, State and others with international contact to work more closely together than ever before. But, in the meanwhile, do not despair of the criticisms you see in the media. There has been no failure of intelligence. We continue to collect and produce the best intelligence in the world. And this one event is not a good measure of the overall quality of our product.



STANSFIELD TURNER
Director